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BEST SELLERS

A BI-WEEKLY REVIEW SERVICE

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Maurine Whipple. The Giant Joshua. Houghton Mifflin. Jan. 2, 1941

In "The Giant Joshua" Maurine Whipple has written an excellent novel of the pioneering life of the Mormons in Utah shortly after the Civil War. The scene of the story is laid in "Dixie" a colonization project of the Mormons on the Virgin river in southern Utah which is founded by command of Brigham Young to supply the territory of Deseret with cotton.

In very general terms it is a tale of conflict between the settlers and the inhospitable country they seek to conquer but more specifically it is the story of Chlorinda MacIntyre's personal struggle with her pioneer environement and with the evils of polygamy.

Clory as the young third wife of Abijah MacIntyre, a self-righteous elder in Mormonism who had raised her after the death of her father, must contend with the jealousy of the older first wife, Bathsheba, and never succeeds in attaining happiness except at rare moments usually unconnected with her husband. She does have a short but unhappy love affair with Free MacIntyre, son of Abijah by his first wife, but Free's death in battle with the Indians and her own recognition of the sinfulness of such conduct ends that phase of her life and thereafter she strives to the utmost to do her duty as a wife.

Although the practice of polygamy is not explicitly condemned yet the author, who is either a Mormon or sympathetic to them, puts into the mouths of her characters expressions which show a pronounced distaste of the custom. The principal characters all contribute observations on this point. Clory says: "If the Gentiles think polygamy is any fun, I'd like to see some of their women try it." "Plurality's a trap you can't get out of and our world will never be reformed." Abijah says in speaking of family disputes: "I had thought to come home to peace but I return like a sow to its wallow."

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David Wight and his wife Palmyra who portray the nearest thing to a happily married plural family say respectively: "There's what a man can make of himself who isn't saddled with polygamy and yet they say we enter plurality because we like it." and "This polygamy business---I tell you a woman has to be hard-gutted---." Actually however the women are faithful to their husbands and strive to keep peace in the family because the Prophet and the law say that it is obligatory and necessary if the women wish to enter heaven.

Intrinsically however the book is a story of pioneer life, of man's attempt to conquer and wrest a living from a land that presents almost insuperable difficulties. Because of persecution the Mormons set out to find a country so inhospitable and so barren that no one else could possibly desire it. The result was Utah or Deseret as it was known to the Latter Day Saints.

The main theme of the story is woven about the struggles and privations of the settlers and their final conquest of the country, after almost incredible setbacks, as typified by their final success in damming the Virgin river as an irrigation project in the face of repeated failures. Among the most quotable incidents in the whole book on the subject of colonization are the following: Apostle Erastus Snow, leader of the colony, soliloquizes "Men didn't colonize in a hurry---you had to sink into the feeling of a country, win acceptance, not demand it." and the comment "Every morning at four o'clock civilization began with the pealing of Abijah's copper prayer bell." Here to the reviewer is the symbolism behind the title of the book. The giant Joshua is a gnarled scraggly tree growing in semi-desert environment and surviving successfully because it adapts itself to the limitations of the environment. In the same way the settlers had to adapt themselves to the opportunities which the country offered before they could be assured of successful survival. Many of their attempts to change conditions met with failure and they succeeded only when they worked with the country rather than against it. The author however using the Joshua tree as pointing with its branches the way to the Promised Land of Deseret.

Incidentally it is interesting to note the pioneer "Ersatz" methods. In the matter of foods, clothing, dyestuffs, medicines, building materials, etc., they rival and surpass the best German techniques.

The book is written in the pioneer idiom of the day. It is frank but not offensive. Love, sex, birth, etc., are discussed as matter of fact occurrences and there is little or nothing to satisfy those who read solely out of morbid curiosity. One incident in which a Federal deputy disparagingly speaks of the Virgin Birth of Christ in questioning a second wife about the parentage of her coming child is somewhat offensive yet the deputy is described as a barbarian and the Mormon women are horrified at the insinuation.

The book can be recommended for discriminating adults because it portrays not so much the Mormon religion but the Mormon way of life which stresses the brotherhood of man and the simple virtues of charity, frugality, temperance, etc. In addition it shows the undesireability of polygamy and other shortcomings of Mormonism. It should not be recommended for young people because of the realistic description of parts of the Mormon Persecution.

XUM

Michael Sadleir. Fanny by Gaslight. Appleton-Century. Jan. 31, 1941, $2.50

Fanny by Gaslight is a purely sensuous and pagan love story built around the life of Vandra Seymore and culminating in her liaison with Harry Somerford. Throughout most of the book Vandra is known as Fanny Hooper, the illegitimate child of Clive Seymore and the daughter of one of Seymore's tenants.

The scene is London in the 1870's and the story differs from others only in being told against a background of prostitution. Indeed the whole book is based upon the idea of showing the operation of prostitution in the English upper classes.

Fanny's mother is married to William Hopwood whose public house "The Happy Warrior" is a blind behind which he panders to the lusts and vices of the so-called "gentlemen". Fanny herself is kept ignorant of this throughout her childhood. It might be well to digress here and say that Fanny never was a prostitute though she condones the practice and seldom expresses scruples of any sort.

After Hopwood is arrested and falsely convicted of murder Fanny, at the age of thirteen, by arrangement with her father is taken into service in his home and eventually becomes the personal maid of Lady Alicia Seymore his wife. Learning that Lady Alicia is having an affair with an army captain and fearful of hurting her father by disclosing it Fanny flees and for a short time lives with "Chunks" ex-factotum of the Happy Warrior now running a dockside pub. From here she accepts a position as secretary and assistant to Kitty Cairns at Florizel 13, another and slightly different type of exclusive bagnio. Kitty was drawn into prostitution by a desire to haunt the self-righteous people of the world who, she felt had ruined her father and through a desire to bring to the "joy-girls" the joy they deserved.

Through Kitty, Fanny meets and falls in love with Harry Somerford and though he wishes to marry her she insists in living with him unwed. For two years they are happy but their affair is terminated, shortly before the birth of her child, by Harry's death in a duel in Paris with Lord Manderstoke, a sadist, who years before had engineered in revenge the conviction of William Hopwood. Fanny bore her child who was killed driving an ambulance in wartime.

In parallel with Fanny's career the story traces the life of her best friend Lucy Beckett who gradually drifts into genteel prostitution and uses Lucy together with Kitty Cairns and Polly, "Chunk's" barmaid, to show various methods of procurement and assignation.

Mr. Sadleir uses an old and well tried stylistic device in having Fanny narrate her story to another who then retells it through the persons of Fanny and Harry. He handles this type of story telling very efficiently and in addition most of the book is free of objectionable language. These however are the only points which can be made in its favor.

On the whole the book must be rejected both on the grounds of objectionable subject matter and the purely pagan morality of its characters.

XUM

It does show the methods by which the puritanical and stuffy Victorian sex codes of that age were circumvented but on the whole it approves of these methods. Sex perversion is condemned but ordinary prostitution in refined circles is not looked upon as degrading. Kitty Cairns even prides herself upon the advantageous later marriages of her girls. Purveyors who keep prostitution decorous are looked upon as benefactors, the sacredness of marriage is denied and mere satisfaction of sensual appetite becomes a noble goal. The book cannot, in conscience, be recommended for any class reader.

Elizabeth Dewing Kaup. Not for the Meek. Macmillan, 1941. 697 p. $2.75

Martin Lyndendaal, native of rural Denmark, lusty, lustful and lucky, comes by way of a brief, youthful sea-going experience to America, where he plunges with all his native vigor, physical and mental, into the steel industry of the 1880's. Personality and acumen bring him to his goal and intimacy with the great. His marriage to a daughter of a proud butdecadent Southern family gives him the needed social lift. Typical he is of the "rugged individualists" of his period, hobnobbing with such other leaders as Carnegie, the elder P.J. Morgan, and "Teddy of the Big Stick". Lyndaal's declining years and the world in which his children live and move is in marked contrast to his own youth. Changed social, political and industrial conditions are similarly indicated.

Successful though he was in industrial and financial achievement, Lyndendaal knew little other happiness. His failure to observe marital fidelity either in theory or in practice destroyed all possibility of complete happiness in home and family life. That his sin should be reflected in at least one of his children was to be expected. The frequency and consequent complications of these amorous adventures make it impossible to recommend the book to other than adult readers. Those of mature mind and interests may find in the picture given of changes in industrial and social life in America during the past fifty years, some compensation for the enormous length of this not very unusual autobiographic novel.

The author has resorted to an unnecessary artifice in order to make the narrative derive from its central character. A "ghost" writer is assigned by an anxious publisher to draw from the ageing magnate the story of his life. Consequently the flow of the story is rudely interrupted at intervals to account for the progress, or lack thereof, in this cooperative undertaking. The novel lacks distinction of style.

The sermon on the Mount records "Blessed are the Meek, for they shall possess the land". This novel of Elizabeth Dewing Kamp assures us that it is only in Heaven that the meek shall reap their reward, for the high places of this world are not for their ilk.

Reader's Digest Books Selected and condensed by the editors of Reader's Digest. Pleasantville, N.Y. Reader's Digest Assoc. 1934, 273 p. $1.00

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"In December, 1934 the Reader's Digest published its first "Book Supplement"--A condensation of Arnold Bennet's classic, How to Live on Twenty-Four Hours a Day. The popularity of the new story among readers was so readily apparent that since December, 1934, the "Book Supplement" has appeared regularly in each issue of the Digest. Today it is the most popular single feature in the magazine."

Because of the public demand for these condensations and the fact that back copies were no longer available the editors have prepared reprints of 14 condensations selected from the past six years of the Reader's Digest.

These condensations are autobiographical and emphasize actions, individuals working out great plans, such as mapping an air route to the Orient, studying climatic conditions of the South Pole, distributing health and medicine wholesale, etc. They are stories of success, except Seabrook's Asylum which shows the lack of self control, Carrell's Man the Unknown (a too-condensed description of man as a physical--rational--moral person) and the "how to become a success" trilogy, Bennet's How to Live on Twenty-Four Hours a Day, Brande's Wake Up and Live, and Link's Return to Religion.

The range of topics is wide, the style always interesting, the book as a whole, enjoyable.

Link's Return to Religion is an item that Catholics will question. He states that he has found the error of his ways and now accepts "The Church". He fails to state what church nor does his brief credo help to identify it. His ideal seems to be a purely extrovert brand of religion, emphasizing good actions and self-sacrifice, a humanitarianism in which prayer and mysticism have no part. His work fails by omission of other basic religious practices rather than by any attack on any doctrine or institution.

With this exception the Symposium is excellent and should prove to be worthwhile reading for all ages and groups.

Vardis Fisher. City of Illusion. Harper & Brothers. March 1941. 382p. $ 2.50

In City of Illusion Vardis Fisher has given us his second good story of pioneer life in the West. This time he does not write of a people and their religion but of a city and its life and again he has told the story well.

City of Illusion is the story of Eilly Bowers and of that lusty, brawling metropolis of the Comstock lode, Virginia City. Shortly before the Civil War silver is discovered near Sun Mountain and in the mad rush for claims twice-married Eilly Cowan and simple Sandy Bowers acquire title to rich mines. Eilly asks two things of life, children and queenship of the city she foresees springing up near the mines. In pursuance of these objectives she marries Sandy and then spends most of her time in vain attempts to make him a "gentleman" and to gain domination over Virginia City. Clothing, servants, a mansion and the various impedimenta of the quickly rich, all these Eilly attains but in her two main purposes

she never succeeds. When finally husband, children, wealth and friends are gone she still clings, in her now unbalanced mind, to her ambitions.

Beyond the tale of Eilly Bowers however, Fisher has written the story of Virginia City, a typical mushroom mining town of the West, and in that lies the value of his book. Conceived in a lust for wealth, its spawn the dregs of society, Virginia City can be nothing but the acme of lawlessness.

Prospectors, murderers, harlots and gamblers are attracted by the lure of quick and easy wealth. With no love for the land, with no attempt to utilize its real riches; the town can only flourish as long as the mines are productive. Wth their failure and the collapse of stock prices rigged by financial swindlers the city is abandoned and becomes a "ghost-town".

The book stresses the falsity and futility of human desire for riches, whether for the creature comforts and social position which they bring or for the power they give over one's fellowmen. It is objectionable insofar as cruelty, murder and evil of all sorts are given the most prominent positions although in essence, the evils are condemned. One objectionable scene describes the treatment of a poor half-crazed evangelist who is billed as "Jesus Christ", escorted by dance-hall girls as "angels" and clubbed into unconsciousness by a mob.

The book can be recommended only with reservations. For the student of history and for the serious intelligent general reader it is well worth while. Its descriptions are raw, its treatment strong, but the general moral tone is good. It is not recommended for the young nor for those adults who wish to read it merely because it appears on best seller lists.

Irvin S. Cobb, Exit Laughing. Bobbs Merrill. March, 1941. 572 p. $3.50

Exit Laughing is Irvin S. Cobb's autobiography and as such is one of the most refreshing books to be published this spring. Mr. Cobb has in the course of his life been a sort of "jack-of-all-literary-trades". As newspaperman, humorist, playwright, short-story writer, lecturer, radio entertainer, he has achieved a measure of success. In all these fields as well as in politics he has known the great and near great and has himself been a part of the picture.

Withthis background he can write authoritatively and interestingly of the American scene through which he moved and in so doing give his readers some of the flavor and intimacy of events usually unknown to the common man. Mr. Cobb is not a debunker. In general he is pleased with the persons and events of which he writes and when forced to speak of disagreeable things he is frank and simple in his condemnation. He recognizes the good and evil in the past and does his best to preserve the character of those about whom he writes. He recognizes our present difficulties but is hopeful that coming generations will overcome them.

As a commentary on the American scene, past and present, the book can be recommended for pleasant and some-

what instructive reading. It is not however a penetrating analysis of underlying causes nor does it offer a panacea for present ills.

Marcus Goodrich. Delilah. Farrar and Rinehart, Inc. $2.75

For those who enjoy a rough and tumble adventure story and for an authentic picture of life on a United States man-of-war, "Delilah", which is an ageing destroyer, makes exciting reading. The author knows the Navy and its men. This reviewer, who has lived somewhat in a Navy atmosphere, suspected that Goodrich had seen service even before we learned that he was a member of a destroyer's crew in the World War.

Notwithstanding the splendid descriptions of the fighting and the number of thrilling adventures that Delilah and her crew of seventy encounter, there are many things which we feel make this book far from the "novel of the year".

One might say that the author is too well versed in his subject, as many of his wordy descriptive passages make difficult reading and can easily be skipped without losing any of the appeal of the book.

Although at the time that the novel is set, that is 1917-1918, the men of the Navy may have been as immoral and brutish as the author describes them, we like to think that, then and now, the caliber of the Navy's men is improving. We feel that fine, clean young men are manning our ships of war and not the perverts of the novel who plan rapes like a maneuver at sea. There is no reason to believe that even now battleships are monasteries, but it is our opinion that Goodrich has overdone this phase of the sailors' lives. The language which the sailors use in their conversation will be offensive to many. We admit that no doubt many of the gobs are as free with profanity as they are portrayed, but here too we think that the men of our modern Navy, and even of the pre-World War Navy, did not all punctuate their remarks with such oaths.

The scene of the story is laid in the South Seas in the islands surrounding the Phillipines; the time covers a few months of 1916 and 1917, and the novel ends with the declaration of war against Germany.

The first incident in chapter one is a description of a forced run being made to take a Catholic monk to a small island to use his influence on an uprising of natives. The monk is successful in his mission. The second chapter is a description of another forced run and the near breakdown of the ship. The redeeming part of the run to the men is that at the end of it they have been promised dry dock and repairs for the ship which they love. They are under orders to search all islands enroute for guns which the Government suspects are being smuggled to Moros for a planned uprising. There is an interesting episode which shows the lines which are drawn between the enlisted men and the officers, and how the officer, Lieutenant Fitzpatrick, and the common seaman, Warrington, crossed this barrier and met on a common footing through their mutual love for the classics and philosophy.

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After limping in and out among the islands, sending forth landing parties, searching them and exploring the mysterious underground river, in which the element of suspense is well presented, the destroyer ends her mission and hobbles into port where she is to receive repairs.

Chapter three describes the mission of these men ashore while the boat is being repaired. There are brawls, wine and women. The men get in trouble. Some of the crew is broken up and transferred to submarine duty; an explosion occurs aboard the submarine and some of their mates are killed. There is an exciting chase in the water of one of the seamen who runs amuck, and as they set sail once more preparing for a new adventure, war is declared on Germany.

Because of its language and the over-emphasis of the incidents of immorality, the book is suggested as reading for adults only and it is not too highly recommended. It is a fairly good book, but it is not anything out of the ordinary, and perhaps its chief reason for popularity is the military awareness of the nation at present.

SURVEY OF FICTION BEST SELLERS AS OF APRIL 17th

Bell — Swamp Water. Little, Brown, 1941
Recommended.
Against the background of Southern Georgia and the Okefenokee Swamp the author describes the life of poor farmers. Ben Regan, the character, is a stalwart, independent youth, whose adventures in swamp and whose loyalty to Tom Keefer, a hunted murderer, constitute a major portion of the story. In spite of a confused outlook on the existence of the soul and on eternity and studied pessimism, such as Ben's doubts that any marriage could be happy, we recommend this book to all adults and to such adolescents who would read it as a clean adventure laid in slightly unusual environement.

Buchanan — Mountain Meadow. Houghton Mifflin Co.1941;
Recommended. America, April 5, 1941, p.723;
Catholic Library World, March 1941, p.193.

Cather — Sapphira and the Slave Girl. Knopf, Dec. 1940.
Recommended. Cf. America, Dec. 14, 1940, p.273;
Cath. World, Feb. 1941, p.634; Commonweal, Jan.10, 1941, p.306; Sign, Feb. 1941, p.443.

Du Gard — World of the Thibaults. Viking, 1941.
Not Recommended. Cf. Commonweal, March 28, 1941, p. 579; America, April 5, 1941, p.721.

Fedorova — The Family. Little, Brown, Sept. 1940.
Recommended. Cf. America, Oct. 12, 1940, p.211.
Cath. World, Jan. 1941, p.505; Sign, Nov. 1940, p.248.

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Goodrich — Delilah. Farrar-Rinehart, Jan. 1941
Recommended with reservations. Cf. America, March 8, p. 609; Commonweal, March 7, p.498; Sign, April, p. 571

Hemingway — For Whom the Bell Tolls. Scribner, 1940
Not recommended. Cf. America. Nov. 23, 1940, p.189; Cath. World, Jan. 1941, p. 502; Commonweal, Dec. 1940. p. 210; Sign, Dec. 1940, p.289.

Hilton — Random Harvest. Little, Brown, Jan. 1941.
Recommended. Cf. Cath. World, March 1941, p.766; Commonweal, Feb. 28, 1941, p.476; Sign, March 1941, p.510.

Hindus — To Sing with the Angels. Doubleday-Doran, Jan. 1940,
Recommended with reservations. Cf. Catholic World, April 1941, p.121; Commonweal, March 7, 1941.

Kaup — Not for the Meek. Macmillan, Jan. 1941
Not recommended. Cf. America, Feb. 22, 1941, p.554.

Marquand — E. Pulham, Esq. Little-Brown, Feb. 1941
Recommended. Cf. Cath. Library World, March 1941, p. 182; Sign, April 1941, p.570

McCullers — Reflections in a Golden Eye. Houghton Mifflin, 1941
Not recommended.
An army post during normal times is the background against which are depicted the lives of a Captain and his Leonora, (a feeble-minded but physically vigorous animal), a Major with a sickly, morbid wife and a Private.

With a desire to taunt and embarrass her husband, one night Leonora stands completely naked before uncurtained windows and is seen by the Private in whose amber-brown (golden) eyes henceforth is a "deep reflection of the sight he had seen". Night after night the Private slips unnoticed into the Captain's house and squats beside the sleeping Leonora's bed, simply gazing at her until finally he is seen by the Captain, who had nourished a hatred against the Private, and is shot.

It is possible that this account of mental sadism, morbidity and abnormality of all sorts would [illegible] interest some psychologists. We cannot recommend it for content, style or general interest.

Roberts — Oliver Wiswell. Doubleday-Doran, Nov. 1940.
Recommended. Cf. America, Dec. 7, 1940, p.245; Commonweal, Dec. 27, 1940, p. 260; Cath. World, Feb. 1941, p.523; Sign, Jan. 1941, p.377.

Rorick — Mr. and Mrs. Cugat. Houghton-Mifflin, Oct. 1940.
Not Recommended. Best Sellers, April 4, 1941

Sadleir — Fanny by Gaslight. Appleton-Century, Jan. 1941; Not recommended. Best Sellers, April 17, 1941

Sinclair — Between Two Worlds. Viking, 1941
Not Recommended. Commonweal, April 11, 1941, p.626

Struther — Mrs. Miniver. Harcourt-Brace, July, 1940.
Recommended. Cf. America, Aug. 10, 1940, p.501; Cath. World, Oct. 1940, p.122; Sign, Nov. 1940, p.253

Tarkington — Heritage of Hatcher Ide. Doubleday-Doran, Feb. 1941,
Recommended. Cf. America, Mar. 29, 1940, p.693

Thirkell — Cheerfulness Breaks In. Knopf, Feb. 1941.
Recommended. Not yet reviewed. Full review in next issue.

Fisher — City of Illusion. Harper, March, 1941. 382 p.
Recommended. Best Sellers, April 17, 1941

Du Maurier — Come wind, come weather. Doubleday-Doran, Feb,1941
Recommended.
In this little book of short sketches the author of the famous Rebecca claims to present a set of true stories taken from the life of England at war. He presents them without literary embellishment or ornament yet with a degree of winning artlessness.

One is the story of a couple who took in two particularly rowdy and impossible evacuated youngsters and changed them into good boys by treating them sympathetically, by asking for their help about the house instead of commanding it with an "or else" tone. Another shows how a shopkeeper changed not only his business rival but a whole street of enemies into cooperative friends by making the first move towards cooperation when he went out of his way to help his rival. In another a reformed friend by his good example changes a pugnacious, drinking, job-losing friend into a good worker and peace-promoting labor leader.

Such is the tenor of these sketches. They stress unselfishness and insist that selflessness, cooperativeness, scrupulous honesty pay in happiness and in everything. Several passages stress God and religion and the desirability of attending divine services.

While not of great literary value, this booklet is nevertheless one which can be highly recommended. It is not mere national propaganda--it is the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments presented in action. Most especially is it recommended reading for high school people and the people in the average walks of life.

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